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ABSTRACT

This study examined ways in which 42 low income mothers used a multifaceted neighborhood-based parent education program. Two different patterns of sequential relationship between use of staff services, verbal participation in a discussion group, attendance, and formation of peer ties were identified. These patterns were shown to be related to initial levels of life event stress. Differential rates of use for program offerings were related to (1) need (specifically, life event stress; support from peers, parents, and other relatives; and number of children); (2) dispositional differences (attitudes toward expression of impulse); and (3) differences in social experience (helping relationships and community participation). (Author)

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Parent Characteristics and the Utilization of a Parent-Child Program*

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Abstract

This study examined ways in which 42 low-income mothers utilized a multi-faceted neighborhood-based parent education program. Two different patterns of sequential relationship between use of staff services, verbal participation in a discussion group, attendance, and formation of peer ties were identified, and shown to be related to initial levels of life event stress. Differential rates of utilization of program offerings were related to need (life event stress; support from peers, parents, and other relatives; number of children); to dispositional differences (attitudes toward expression of impulse); and to differences in social experience (helping relationships, community participation).

Parent Characteristics and the Utilization

of a Parent-Child Program

Increasingly education and support programs for parents are viewed as effective ways to improve the development of young children from low-income families. In the past two decades of experience with Head Start and other early childhood interventions, there has been significant growth in the development of efforts to enhance the roles and skills of parents in facilitating the development of their children (Powell, 1982). Much of the interest in family-oriented programs stems from data which suggest that early intervention is more effective when parents are involved (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). In a recent critical analysis of the history and future of early childhood intervention, Zigler and Berman (1983) recommended continued experimental development of family-centered programs, and research on various elements of family support approaches to early intervention.

Research on parent education and support programs generally has examined program outcomes, especially effects on children (for a review, see Clarke-Stewart & Apfel, 1978). For example, a well-designed study of comprehensive, long-term programs for low-income parents of young children found a positive program influence on the intellectual development of children (Andrews, et al., 1982). Program effects on parents have received minimal attention. Recent studies of interventions for low-income parents indicate program influences on mothers' ego development and teaching style (Slaughter, 1983), and improvement in such family life conditions as housing and medical care (Trickett, Apfel, Rosenbaum & Zigler, 1982).

In spite of many reported problems (e.g., attendance) in implementing and sustaining programs for low-income parents (see Chilman, 1973), little is known about what types of parents are attracted to and benefit from different program offerings. Several analyses have uncovered no relationship between curriculum content and program outcome (Goodson & Hess, 1975; Kessen & Fein, 1975). These investigations used child (not parent) measures of program outcome, and approached the question of differential program effects from a program (not participant) perspective. There is a need for detailed investigations of the ways in which parents are involved in family-centered programs and the correlates of participation over time (Wandersman, 1983). Research on parents' experiences in intervention programs may contribute to an understanding of the mechanisms by which programs work or fail to work (Travers & Light, 1982), and may be used to strengthen the match between program design and participant characteristics.

This article reports a study of relations between parent characteristics and indices of participation in a neighborhood-based educational support program for low-income and working-class mothers of very young children. The research investigated predictors of program participation over time, including processes of participant induction into the intervention program. The following aspects of mothers' social environments were examined as predictors of program participation: personal social network ties; participation in community organizations; life event and everyday stress; and number of children. Also examined as a predictor of participation were mothers' attitudes toward the expression of impulse. Our theoretical approach to each of the predictor variables and to the conceptualization of program participation is discussed below briefly.

Traditionally most parents have received a significant amount of assistance with child rearing from social network members (Sussman, 1968; Sollie & Miller, 1980). A frequent argument for the existence of family support programs is that informal network assistance has decreased considerably in recent years and hence parents are in need of supportive programs (e.g., Weissbourd, 1983). There has been little research on the provision of informal social network support and participation in a parent program. Is a low level of informal support, for instance, associated with a high use of program services? Findings of a study by Birkel and Reppucci (1983) offer some indirect support for the proposition that network deficits lead to a greater use of a program. Attendance at parent group sessions was negatively related to the density of social network ties and to the number of monthly contacts with kin. The study did not examine the provision of aid by network members; while dense networks have been found to furnish greater quantities of support (Hirsch, 1979), a recent study found that differences in network density did not predict satisfaction with social support (Stokes, 1983).

The focus on network density in the Birkel and Reppucci study is consistent with the emphasis on structural properties of social networks in many studies of networks and the utilization of formal services (Freidson, 1960, 1961; McKinlay, 1973). An alternative approach is to examine the actual functions of social networks that are likely to be found in an intervention program (e.g., socializing; instrumental aid), especially in regards to stressful events and everyday needs. Whether a program is utilized as a substitute for or a supplement to an existing social network may be understood more clearly by examining specific network functions rather than developing inferences about network functions on the basis of information

regarding network structure. Variations in the frequency of contact and flow of resources among network members (Wellman, 1981) may relate to different patterns of program involvement.

It has been suggested that an individual's previous and on-going involvements in formal groups and organizations may predict participation in a community organization (Wandersman, 1981). In a study of relations among neighbors, Unger and Wandersman (1983) found that leaders and members of newly-formed neighborhood block clubs belonged to significantly more community organizations than nonmembers. Also, early terminators of involvement in the parent-child program presented in the present paper were found to have fewer community involvements than parents who remained in the program long term (Powell, 1984). Research is needed to determine whether parents who are involved in community organizations participate differently in an intervention program than parents who have few or no involvements with community groups.

Environmental stress factors (e.g., unemployment) have been suggested as major reasons for low attendance levels and the ineffectiveness of many parent education programs for low-income populations (Chilman, 1973). Little research has been done on the relation of stress to utilization of a parent program. The family stress literature has tended to emphasize adaptation to stress as an intrafamily process. A family's transactions with the community surrounding the management of stress has received limited consideration in research and theoretical work (McCubbin, 1979).

Number of children has been found to be predictive of length of participation in a parent program; in several studies, parents of one child only were more likely to drop out (Powell, 1984; Lambie, Bond & Weikart, 1974). It is not known how number of children relates to the participation patterns of parents who remain in an intervention program long term.

Personality factors or dispositional tendencies which influence child rearing may also influence transactions with the interpersonal environment (Cohler, Weiss, & Grunebaum, 1970). That is, there may be consistency between the quality of a mother's verbal participation in group discussions and her attitudinal/behavioral orientations toward her child. Gottlieb (1981) has speculated that personality factors may be a determinant of verbal contribution to parent group discussions. A readiness to disclose one's feelings and experiences in a peer group context may be associated with dispositional tendencies; for instance, sensitizers, as compared with repressors, may engage in a higher level of verbal participation (Carroll, 1972; Chelune, 1977). The present study included as one potential predictor of program participation a measure of maternal attitudes toward a child's expression of impulse, specifically, the expression of anger and curiosity.

A critical question in the study of parent programs is how to measure participation. Typically quantitative studies of program participation have used attendance levels (e.g., Birkel & Reppucci, 1983), generally with no attention to differences across time. Yet attendance is just one dimension of program participation. What happens after participants arrive at meetings? It appears there has been no quantitative investigation of group discussions in parent programs, even though group processes typically are seen as the core experience in a parent support program (McGuire & Gottlieb, 1979). Since a major goal of most family support programs is to facilitate supportive interactions and relationships among fellow participants (Weissbourd, 1983), an important dimension of program participation may be the quality of interpersonal ties with program peers. There has been little

systematic study of relationships among participants in a parent program; however, qualitative data suggest that peer ties are a major benefit of program participation (Slaughter, 1983; Andrews, et al., 1982). Self-disclosure may play an important role in the development of interpersonal ties (Duck, 1980) with program peers. In addition to relations with program peers, previous research suggests that utilization of staff services is a meaningful part of participation in an intervention program for some parents (Powell, 1983).

The present study is viewed as a detailed quantitative investigation of the ways in which parent characteristics at the point of program entry are associated with different dimensions of participation in a parent-child program during the first 12 months of involvement. The study goes beyond the existing literature in that it (a) considers predictor variables not previously examined in relation to parent programs; (b) includes a comprehensive set of indices of program participation; (c) examines relationships over time; and (d) gives particular attention to differences in the process by which participants initially connect with the program (induction processes).

METHOD

Description of Parent-Child Program

The intervention program examined in this study was based in a 2 x 4 mile white, working-class, suburban neighborhood initially identified by school officials as having a large number of children with low academic achievement and socially isolated low-income families. Early intervention

with families was viewed as a potentially helpful way to improve school performance. The goal of the program was to enhance the development of young children through a focus on the conditions of parenthood and the process of parent-child relations. Theoretically the program reflected a socioecological perspective wherein the quality of child rearing was related to the nature of mothers' interactions with their immediate social environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Specifically, the aims of the project were to strengthen mothers' informal (e.g., peer network) and formal (e.g., social services) support systems, and to increase mothers' knowledge of how children develop, with particular attention to parent-child relations.

The program was multifaceted. The core was a small long-term discussion group of 5 to 10 mothers who met twice weekly for two hours. Paraprofessionals who were trained in child development and group processes took responsibility for the meetings, which were characterized by a mix of brief staff presentations and considerable discussion among participants. Staff contributions consisted of practical information about child development, parent-child relations, and the utilization of existing community resources. Participants shared their experiences and ideas about rearing children, being a parent, and living with the particular conditions of the project neighborhood. Staff members were strongly committed to the belief that the program should be responsive to member input; to a considerable extent, it was thought that the parent groups should "belong" to the members and not the staff.

A quantitative analysis of the topics of group discussion over a one-year period indicated a significant increase in attention to group functioning (e.g., plans, activities) during the third quarter of the first year.

Discussion of group life rose from 28% of the formal meeting time during the first quarter to 48% of the time during the third quarter; it returned to 28% of the time during the fourth quarter ( ). Our interpretation of this shift was that the mothers' groups, like other participatory groups which have been studied (e.g., social work groups, therapy groups, T-groups), had to deal with issues of membership and group development before they could establish a pattern of successful functioning (see Bennis, 1964; Lacoursiere, 1980; Garland, Jones & Kolodny, 1965).

Children accompanied their mothers to the program. A preschool staffed by program workers was heavily attended by older siblings. Infants remained with their mothers during the meetings for about the first 6 months of participation. During subsequent months the infants spent about one-half of the formal group meeting time in the care of community paraprofessionals in a room near the parent group room; this enabled group discussions to proceed without the distractions of increasingly mobile infants.

In addition to the group meetings, there were several special events each year designed for participation by the entire family (e.g., picnics), and a weekly evening session which usually dealt with a personal development topic (e.g., dieting) and typically was organized and led by mothers (not staff). The evening session was the only program component which did not involve children.

There were several staff members who could be consulted about child-rearing issues, or medical or social service needs. In addition to the paraprofessional group facilitators, the staff included a part-time social worker; a part-time public health nurse; and a specialist in child development who served as the program coordinator. Staff members saw their role as providing a limited amount of direct assistance; for more serious problems,

their goal was to help the participant make connections with the appropriate community agency or service provider. Staff members also encouraged participants to share their concerns and problems with group members. Therapy was not provided by program staff members.

The program first operated in a community center and later at a former HUD house renovated for program purposes. Both facilities were located in the neighborhood where participants lived. The neighborhood's residential structures (largely multiple-dwelling) were built as temporary housing during World War II. Mothers were eligible for program participation if they lived in the target neighborhood and had an infant 6 months or younger. Program participation was voluntary and involved no fees. Mothers were recruited to the program through contacts made from hospital records; responses to printed announcements and referrals by lay persons familiar with the program; door-to-door canvassing by program staff; and referrals from public health programs, schools and other agencies. Transportation was provided to and from program activities.

Sample

The sample consisted of 42[1] white women who remained with the program for at least one year.[2] At the time of program entry their average age was 23 years. Most had finished high school. Almost 90% of the homes included both parents of the infant. About one-fifth of the mothers entered the program with their first child; two-fifths entered with a second child; and two-fifths entered with a child having two or more older siblings.

Annual family income was under $7500 per year in 37% of the homes; above $15,000 per year in 24% of the homes; and between $7500 and $15,000 in 39% of the homes. At the time of entering the program, 29% of the

families reported welfare assistance, no job, or both.

Data Collection

Data collection was funded for a period of three years. During this time, six discussion groups were formed. Groups were formed sequentially over time; incoming mothers occasionally joined an existing group but typically waited for enough people to be enrolled so that a new group could be started. The earliest groups continued for over two years before data collection stopped. The last of the six groups to be organized was nearing the end of its first year when data collection ended. All members of this group continued in the program for as long as one year, but information on their one-year status was incomplete.

Three major sources of data were used for the present study: interviews with participants; observations of group discussions; and staff records of attendance and use of staff services. All interview and observation data were collected by researchers who were perceived as being part of the regular program staff.

Interviews. Participants were interviewed at the time they joined the program, and thereafter every six months. The baseline interview was the major source of information about predictor variables. All interviews were conducted in the participant's home.

Group observation. Trained observers familiar to the program participants visited each group periodically to make a record of the interaction in the group. The observer worked with a record sheet covering the two-hour period. It was divided into quarter-minute intervals. Each 15 seconds during the formal part of the meeting the observer noted who was speaking,

and coded the comment according to a system modified from the Bales (1950) system. Along the upper margin of the sheet she kept a running record of the topics which were discussed. The formal meeting time never occupied the full two hours; when the group was not in formal session the observer recorded what was happening instead (e.g., socializing, mid-session break, arts and crafts). She also kept a record of what topics were discussed during systematic samples of time from the informal parts of the meeting.

Attendance and service records. Records of attendance were kept for all group meetings, and also for special events and extra evening sessions. In addition, from the beginning of the program each staff member kept a record of all telephone calls made to or from staff members. These records were used to examine participant use of staff services.

Time Frame and Deviation Scores

All information about attendance, use of staff services, and observed behavior in the group was coded to reflect the time frame of the interviews. An initial period of 15 weeks (Time 1) was considered representative of early months of participation; a second period of 24 weeks (Time 2) was considered representative of 6-month data; and the subsequent 26-week period circumscribed the 12-month data (Time 3). Observations of an individual's behavior in the group were classified according to her own time line, not that of the group. There was, of course, a rough correspondence between the amount of time that had elapsed for a group and for its members; usually a substantial nucleus started at about the same time.

The six groups included in the study differed from one another in many ways. The average rate of attendance during the first 15 months, for example, was 72.5% in the highest group and 47.6% in the lowest group. An individual

with an attendance rate of 60% would be judged low in the first group, high in the second group, and average in a third group. Similarly, a given score on frequency of participation or extent of acquaintance with other group members could be considered meaningful only in relation to the scores of other members of the same group. Accordingly, it was decided that measures of individual behavior in the context of the group would be converted to deviation scores. Each person's score would be her own deviation from the mean score for her group for a given time period.

Measures of Program Participation

Attendance. Three kinds of attendance measures were examined. Attendance scores for the group meetings were computed separately for each time period. Scores on attendance at special events and attendance at the extra, voluntary evening sessions were each computed for the entire time of a member's participation.

Verbal behavior. Two aspects of a participant's verbal behavior in the discussion group were examined in this study: verbal participation and narrative behavior. An index was computed to indicate the amount of verbal participation shown during a given time period. A score showing how many quarter minutes each person was speaking was computed for the formal part of each meeting observed. These totals were averaged to find the mean number of quarter minutes during which an average member was speaking during a given meeting, and each individual was assigned a score representing her deviation from that mean. Deviation scores for each individual were averaged across all meetings in a given time period, yielding a single score for each time period in amount of verbal participation. These scores were designed so that 100 represented a score which coincided with

the group mean, and deviations from 100 represented the number of quarter-minutes per hour by which the individual deviated from that mean.

A small amount of the observed interaction was selected for analysis of individual variations in participation style. Where possible, a segment of the meeting was selected in which there was widespread general discussion. The number of minutes of observation providing information about participation style varied among individuals, ranging from 11 to 98 minutes, with an average for each time period of about 55 minutes per person.

The category of narrative behavior was created by the project staff[3] to refer to interaction in which an individual was offering a report of experience rather than a report of opinion.[4] Since much of the effort of this intervention program was directed toward the sharing of experience, narrative behavior could be highly appropriate. When abused, however, narrative behavior could take the form of a monologue having no relevance or interest except to the speaker. The incidence of narrative behavior at times 1, 2 and 3 was 9%, 15%, and 14%, respectively. Agreement among observers in scoring narrative behavior was .82.

Scores on narrative behavior were computed to show an individual's rate of narration, defined as the number of quarter-minutes per hour in which she engaged in narration. Deviation scores were not used, since they would have introduced irrelevant distinctions among persons who did not narrate at all; persons in a group where one or two persons exhibited a great deal of narrative behavior could have received huge negative scores.

Service. From the staff records of telephone calls, a measure was compiled indicating the total number of service calls associated with each participant. The score was computed to show the average number of calls per week for each participant for each time period. Service calls were

defined as calls in which the participant was asking for service or receiving help, or calls made on behalf of the participant to other persons or agencies in the community.

Peer ties. There were two measures of a participant's relations with program peers: a measure of self-disclosure and an index of acquaintance. Interviews conducted after entry into the program (at 6 and 12 months) included a self-disclosure questionnaire, on which the respondent was asked to indicate about each person in the group whether she "(a) knows me well; (b) kind of knows me; (c) doesn't know very much about me; (d) doesn't know me at all." She also was asked about contact outside the meetings: did she see any other members, how often, did they share meals, did they share rides, did they talk on the telephone. At another point in the interview, the respondent was asked to list all of her friends, in or out of the program. Two measures were computed, directed toward different aspects of an individual's relationships with others in the group.

A measure of self-disclosure excluded those whom a person described as "doesn't know me at all," and for the remaining persons, computed an index by assigning values of 4, 3 and 2 to alternatives a, b, and c; summing across persons; and dividing the obtained total value by the maximum possible (i.e., by the value which would have been obtained if the respondent had said that everyone who knew her at all knew her very well). This served as a measure of how close a person felt to others in the group with whom she acknowledged some connection.

An index of acquaintance utilized information from the self-disclosure questionnaire and other parts of the interview to classify each other member of the group as a friend, acquaintance, or as unrelated. Unrelated persons were those identified by alternative (d) on the self-disclosure

questionnaire. To be classified as a friend, each member of a pair had to indicate that the other was a friend, in one or more of three ways: by reporting that the person knows me fairly well (alternatives a or b); by reporting friendly association outside the group meetings; or by naming the other person as a friend. Persons with some positive connection short of reciprocal friendship were classified as acquaintances. Weights of 3, 2 and 1 were assigned to the relationships of friendship, acquaintance, and unrelated, and for each person, a score was computed representing her average level of acquaintance with other group members. Since very few persons were identified as reciprocal friends, this index was sensitive chiefly to variations in the number of persons with whom a person felt she had no connection (i.e., to her sense of being connected with more distant members of the group).

Measures of Predictor Variables

Social Network Support. There were four measures pertaining to parents' social networks derived from extensive interview data about interpersonal contact and instrumental help: reciprocity; supportive contact with relatives; supportive contact with unrelated peers; and parent support.

Detailed information was collected in baseline interviews about an individual's contact with friends and relatives. She was asked to list all of her friends, and to report for each, how often she saw the person, how often they talked on the telephone, and where the person lived. The same information was obtained about all relatives.

For purposes of this study, an inventory of everyday coping was developed to obtain information about instrumental help given or received in relation to needs for food, clothing, housing, medical care, pet care, car care, and laundry. The baseline interviews asked about such helping

activities during the previous 12-month period. Sources or targets of help (helping partners) were classified as parents (31%); other relatives of the parent generation (7%); relatives of own generation (22%); nonrelated peers (19%); and agencies and insurers (21%). For this sample, most of the helping partners were relatives, with parents the major contributors of help. The number of persons named as helping partners ranged from 4 to 26, with an average of 11.

An index of reciprocity was computed, in which each helping partner was given a score ranging from 1 to 6. The score reflected the number of different kinds of help given or received (1; 2; 3 or more) and whether this help was part of a one-way helping relationship (weighted scores of 1, 2, or 3) or a two-way helping relationship (weighted scores of 4, 5, or 6). Scores were then summed across all helping partners. A high score reflected both a large number of helping partners, and a high level of reciprocity associated with the helping process. The index of reciprocity included help given to or received from parents.

Information about frequency of personal contact and extent of instrumental help was utilized to provide scores on supportive contact with unrelated peers[5] and supportive contact with relatives. Because help from parents played such a large role for families in this sample, it was kept apart for special attention; the measure of supportive contact with relatives referred to relatives other than parents and parents-in-law.

Each person who was named as friend, relative, or helping partner was given a score assigning one point for frequency of contact as high as weekly; one point for a one-way helping relationship; and two points for a reciprocal helping relationship. Scores for all persons in the category of interest (relatives or peers) were then summed and averaged. A high score indicated

both a large number of people seen at least once a week, and a high level of helping -- especially reciprocal helping -- associated with these contacts. The index of relative contact was statistically independent of the index of peer contact (r=.05) but both measures were correlated with the index of reciprocity; correlations were .556 for peer contact and .229 for relative contact.

Examination of data from the inventory of everyday coping indicated that parental help and agency help were negatively correlated (r=-.34) and were related in opposite ways to other variables. Accordingly, a single measure of parent support was created in which people who received a lot of help from parents and a little or none from agencies were high, and those who received a lot of help from agencies and not much from parents were low. The low position, in which high need was evidenced by the high level of agency support but in which parental support was lacking, was one indication of high stress. The index of parent support showed a low positive correlation with peer contact (r=.27, $p < .10$), a low but not significant correlation with reciprocity (r=.22) and no correlation with relative contact (r=.01).

Social participation. Each prospective member was asked in the baseline interview about other groups or activities outside the home in which she was currently an active participant. There was relatively little activity of this kind. A person was classified as high if she participated in two or more activities (36%); as medium if she reported one activity (28%); and as low if she reported no activities (36%).

Stress. This paper reports findings for two measures of stress: life event stress and a measure of total stress, which is a composite measure of several stress scales. The total stress measure also was used to dichotomize the sample by high and low stress.

The Holmes and Rahe (1967) life event inventory was used to measure life event stress. Questions were asked in the baseline interviews about events which had occurred during the previous 12 months. For each event which had occurred, the respondent was asked how much it had upset her at the time that it happened, and whether she now considered the event as having had a good effect or a bad effect. Weighted scores were computed, using weights of 1 to 5 for disruption and weights of 1 to 5 for consequences.

A single measure of total stress was created, combining information about parent support, life event stress, marital stress, and subjective financial stress. The latter two measures came from the Ilfeld (1976) current social stressors scale. To measure marital stress, we used the marital stress subscale of the Ilfeld instrument; it showed a correlation of .61 with the life event stress measure. An item analysis of the Ilfeld financial stress subscale indicated that the items providing the most reliable discrimination within the sample were those having to do with everyday hardship: difficulty in finding enough money for food, clothing, leisure, and monthly payments. A five-item measure reflecting this kind of "subjective" hardship was created and examined. It had an alpha value of .75, and showed subjective financial stress to be related to marital stress ($r=.49$, $p<.001$) and to life event stress ($r=.22$, n.s.).[6]

To develop an ordinal index of total stress, each measure of the four components of total stress was dichotomized to distinguish between those whose scores showed acute stress and others who were relatively low in stress. Four types of stress were identified: (1) deficient parent support; (2) life event stress or marital stress, but moderate to high parent support; (3) financial stress only; (4) no indications of acute stress. This four-category measure of total stress also was used to identify two subsamples

within the study: a set of 15 persons who showed acute stress on the measure of parent support, marital stress, or life event stress (categories 1 and 2 above); and a set of 26 persons who were comparatively low in stress (categories 3 and 4 above).[7]

Number of children. Families were classified as having only one child (the target infant); two children; or three or more children. This variable did not always relate to program participation in a linear fashion and so it was treated as a categorical rather than an ordinal variable in all of the analyses. The measure of association used for number of children was eta, and significance was assessed using ANOVA and an F-test.

Maternal Attitudes. The Maternal Attitude Scale (Cohler, Weiss, & Grunebaum, 1970) was administered at group meetings early in the program. The scale is a 233-item Likert type instrument with items written to measure Sander's (1962, 1964) theory of the issues or tasks confronting the mother during the first three years of a child's life. A major theoretical premise of this instrument is that attitudes determine aspects of an individual's adjustment to the social environment (Cohler, et al., 1970). The measure has been used in studies of normal and emotionally disturbed mothers (Cohler, et al., 1970); mother-infant attachment (Egeland & Farber, in press); and high-risk mothers (Brunnquell, Crichton & Egeland, 1981). It was decided to analyze our data to obtain scales specifically relevant for our sample, each of which would contain only items meeting the criteria of being able to discriminate within the sample; being meaningful to the persons in the sample; correlating strongly with the scales of which they were a part; and not correlating strongly with any other of our scales. This analysis yielded a set of 52 items, grouped into four scales. Scale scores were computed for each of the 64 persons who responded to the MAS,[8] and then converted to Z-scores.

One scale which proved to have significant correlations with the measures of program participation was based upon items relating to impulse control. The items of this scale were taken from the MAS a priori scales on curiosity, sex play, and anger, and asked the mother to agree or disagree with statements indicating that the child should be allowed/encouraged to show curiosity and express anger. The items all referred to the desirabililty of allowing direct expression of impulse, and therefore showed a satisfactory level of face validity. The value of alpha for the 12-item scale was .809. Component items are listed in the Appendix. The scale is viewed as an indicator of impulse expression, with the main distinction having to do with a mother's tendency to be expressive or controlled in dealing with impulse.

Data Analyses

Examination of the relationship between predictor variables and program participation began with correlations. Each predictor variable was examined for possible correlations with each of the measures of program participation. It became apparent that several of the variables showed substantial departures from linearity. Attendance and verbal participation both showed relationships to other variables such that the people with high scores (e.g., top quartile) differed systematically from the others, but these systematic effects did not extend to differences among people in the lower three quartiles. Some of the predictor variables showed relationships in which the two extreme positions resembled each other and differed from a middle position. Accordingly, a systematic search was made for non-linear relationships between predictor variables and program participation. In cases where non-linear relationships were found, statistical significance was assessed using analysis of

variance; statements of association utilized eta, the correlation ratio, instead of Pearson's r

After completing the analysis of zero-order relationships among variables, partial correlations were computed for each predictor variable, with other predictor variables held constant. In most cases this analysis did not extend information beyond the zero-order correlation analysis. When there was additional information generated by this analysis, it will be reported in the text.

An effort was made to identify variables which served to modify relationships between other pairs of variables. Impulse expression and stress were found to be two such modifying variables. That is, when the sample was dichotomized on one of these modifying variables, relationships between variables would be found in one part of the sample but not in the other. Details are reported in the results section below.

All probability values represent two-tailed tests of significance, unless otherwise indicated.

Results of the analyses are presented and discussed in two separate sections. The first pertains to processes by which a member established a connection with the program. The second set of analyses deals with relations between predictor variables and program participation over time.

Results of Analysis I: Induction into the Program

Relations among program participation variables were examined in an effort to determine change over time in the processes by which mothers became connected to the intervention program. The relation of predictor variables to associations between participation variables also was investigated.

The relationship between verbal participation and attendance fluctuated with time. These two kinds of participation were strongly correlated at time 1, uncorrelated at time 2, and correlated again at time 3 (see Table 1).

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The linkage over time proceeded from verbal participation to attendance. Verbal participation was correlated with subsequent attendance; attendance was not correlated with subsequent verbal participation. Verbal participation at time 1 showed particularly strong relationships with all of the attendance measures, including attendance at special events ($r=.42$, $p<.006$) and attendance at evening sessions ($r=.40$, $p<.008$). When the sample was dichotomized at the mean on maternal attitude toward impulse expression, it was found that the relationship between verbal participation and attendance originated with the persons who were relatively high on the impulse expression scale; among persons who were low (controlled) in impulse expression attitudes, attendance was unrelated to verbal participation.

At time 2, number of service calls showed a strong correlation with verbal participation, and a weak correlation with narrative behavior (see Table 1). Also, life event stress showed a correlation with narrative behavior which was statistically significant at time 2 ($r=.38$, $p<.05$). These correlations originated in the high stress subsample. For this subsample, service at time 2 showed a correlation of .64 ($p<.02$) with verbal participation at time 2, and a correlation of .64 ($p<.04$) with verbal participation at time 3. Service at time 3 showed a correlation of .56 ($p<.08$) with verbal participation at time 3. There was no relationship between verbal participation at time 1 and service at either time 1 ($r=-.03$) or at time 2 ($r=.17$). However, the relationship between narrative behavior

and service began at time 1. The people who were high in service calls at time 2 were high in narrative behavior at both time 1 and time 2 (see Table 2). For the low stress subsample, there were no significant relationships between number of service calls and either verbal participation or narrative behavior.

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Narrative behavior appeared to be an indicator of the process by which persons formed ties with fellow group members. This process showed differences in timing between high stress and low stress subsamples (see Table 2). For the low stress subsample, narrative behavior at time 1 was correlated with subsequent measures of both acquaintance and disclosure. Narrative behavior at later time periods did not show these relationships. For the high stress subsample, narrative behavior at time 1 was correlated with subsequent service calls, but no subsequent peer ties. However, narrative behavior at time 2 and at time 3 showed strong correlations with disclosure at times 2 and 3. Relationships between narrative and acquaintance were much weaker, with correlations approaching statistical significance (i.e., $p < .10$) when the acquaintance measures of time 3 were compared with narrative behavior at times 2 and 3.

Discussion of Analysis I

Taken together, these findings indicate two different processes of induction into the program. Stress level and attitudes toward impulse expression appeared to be important correlates of the two different induction pathways.

In what might be called the major pattern, mothers established a level of involvement early in the program through verbal participation in the group discussions. Persons with a high level of verbal participation at this time continued to show high attendance throughout the year at group meetings and at extra events and evening sessions. This sequence was found in the expressive but not the controlled subsample. The use of narrative behavior in the early months of the program as a means of committing oneself to the peer group was characteristic of the low stress subsample. Those who spoke about themselves and their experiences in child rearing (narrative) during early months of participation established ties with fellow group members which continued throughout the year.

The second process of induction into the program was associated with high stress. It suggested an interplay between verbal behavior in group discussions and use of staff services, and a time delay (compared to the major induction process) in establishing ties with peers. Parents in the high stress subsample were likely to make their initial approach to the program by getting help from the staff. This was especially true for persons who engaged in narration during the early months of the program. Staff members encouraged them to share their experiences with the group, and it appears that around time 2 they did so. To the extent that they engaged in such (narrative) sharing, they began to develop ties with other group members. For them, narrative behavior exhibited at times 2 and 3 served to establish linkages with other group members in a manner similar to that which was experienced by low stress persons who exhibited narrative behavior at time 1. However, parents in the high stress subsample retained a more restricted awareness of the group; they came to feel well connected with other "friends" in the group (disclosure measure), but remained out of touch with members perceived as more distant from self (acquaintance measure).

Recall from the earlier description of topics discussed by the parent groups that there was a dramatic increase in attention to group functioning during the third quarter. This time period began with the time 2 interviews with parents. This attention to group functioning and the relationship between narrative behavior and stress at time 2 suggests that, surrounding the six-month period, a major developmental task for the parent groups was to assimilate members experiencing high stress.

Analysis II: Predictors of Program Participation

Examination of relationships between predictor variables and program utilization was guided by the prediction that an increased level of participation would be associated with the following: (a) limited family and nonfamilial peer social network ties, including minimal involvement in reciprocal helping relationships; (b) existing involvements with community organizations; (c) stressful life circumstances; (d) more than one child; and (e) a positive attitude toward the child's expression of impulse. No predictions were made about the specific program dimensions that might be related to these predictor variables, although it was expected that high stress would be related to utilization of staff services. Results are reported in Table 3.

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Supportive peer contact showed an inverse relationship with attendance at special events and at extra evening sessions. Persons who lacked supportive peer contact on entry into the program were more likely to attend these extra program offerings. A positive correlation existed between peer contact and narrative behavior at time 3.

Supportive contact with relatives was associated with a high level of acquaintance at time 3; persons with more relative contact were more likely to report some sense of connection even with those members of the group perceived as relatively distant from oneself. Persons with supportive relative contact also showed a tendency to be high in verbal participation at time 3; the difference between the high quartile on participation and the other three quartiles was statistically significant ($t=2.34$, $p < .03$).

Parent support was positively correlated with both acquaintance and disclosure at time 2.

Persons who reported a high level of reciprocal helping relationships before entering the program exhibited a high amount of narrative behavior in the peer group at time 1 and again at time 3. Also, for the low stress subsample, reciprocity was related to number of service calls at time 1.

Participation in community organizations showed a U-shaped relationship with verbal participation in the group discussions. Persons reporting an intermediate level of social participation -- one activity, not none and not two -- were low in verbal participation at times 2 and 3. They also were less likely to attend extra evening sessions.

The measure of total stress was correlated with number of service calls, as predicted. ANOVA utilizing four categories of stress showed a significant difference between high stress and low stress subgroups in number of service calls, particularly at time 2. The difference between the high stress subgroup and the low stress subgroup in number of service calls was significant at time 1 ($t=1.68$, $p < .06$, one-tailed), time 2 ($t=4.26$, $p < .001$), and at time 3 ($t=2.20$, $p < .04$). Life event stress showed a negative relationship with attendance at group meetings. Persons experiencing more stress

showed lower attendance at group discussions, particularly at times 2 and 3. However, when they came to group meetings they were likely to be high in narrative behavior, as reported earlier (see Analysis I results section).

Attendance at special events and group meetings (time 3) both showed the same relationship to number of children: families with two children were high in attendance, those with three or more children were intermediate, and families with only one child were low. Because of the deviation from 1-2-3 order of categories, number of children was treated as a categorical variable rather than an ordinal variable, and was analyzed using ANOVA, with association reported using eta. Number of children showed an ordinal relation to number of service calls, particularly at time 3. Families with three children received the most service, families with two children were intermediate, and families with one child were low.

Attitudes toward the expression of impulse were correlated with attendance at group meetings, attendance at special events, and verbal participation. The correlations with attendance and verbal participation were significant for all time periods. Although the zero-order correlation between impulsiveness and attendance at time 2 was not statistically significant, a partial correlation analysis indicated a relationship that was significant when other variables were controlled (partial $r = .35$; $p < .04$).

Impulse expression also was correlated with narrative behavior at time 1, and with disclosure at time 2. The relationship between impulsive expression and narrative behavior at time 1 was found only in the low stress subsample; the relationship between impulse expression and disclosure at time 2 was characteristic of both the low and high stress subsample.

Discussion of Analysis II

The findings lend support to the notion that participation in a parent program is related to the quality of a parent's social environment (Gray & Wandersman, 1982). Different dimensions of program involvement related to different aspects of a parent's social environment. The findings also suggest a strong association between a dispositional variable (attitudes toward impulse expression) and behavior in the program setting.

Family and friend networks related to program participation in different ways. Extracurricular program activities seemed to compensate for limited nonfamilial peer ties. The peer-dominated evening sessions and, to a lesser extent, special events were more heavily attended by mothers who had fewer supportive contacts with nonfamilial peers; attendance at regular group meetings was not related to the amount of supportive contact with peers prior to joining the program. Support from parents and other relatives was associated with the development of ties with fellow group members. Parent support at program entry had a positive relationship with the acquaintance and self-disclosure measures at six months of program participation, and supportive contact with relatives was correlated with acquaintance at 12 months. Unlike Birkel and Reppucci (1983), we did not find a negative relationship between parent contact and program attendance; in our study, parent contact was unrelated to attendance at any time period. Moreover, our data do not support the idea that frequent parent contact inhibits program participation; to the contrary, in the present study supportive kin ties appeared to provide a context for the development of meaningful interpersonal relations with peers. The findings about parent support are similar to the results of a study of a home-based parent education program which indicated that parents with extensive family networks were more responsive to home

visitors than parents with more limited family networks (Kessen & Fein, 1975).

Reciprocal helping relationships with relatives and nonfamilial peers before program entry seemed to help mothers move more rapidly to establish relationships with staff or peers in the program. Reciprocity was related to early (time 1) narrative behavior in group discussion and, for the low stress subsample, to utilization of staff services in the initial months of program involvement.

Consistent with other low-income populations (Hyman & Wright, 1971), the sample in the present study was minimally involved in community organizations; hence, there was a limited variance in the measure of social participation. Nevertheless, it appears that two markedly different personal histories regarding community participation predicted a similarly high level of verbal participation in parent group discussions: an existing void in community participation or an existing pattern of organizational activity suggesting highly developed interest in group involvement. These findings are consistent simultaneously with a compensatory model of social participation, which would predict that persons lacking social activities outside the home would make use of a program offering such activity, and with a consistency model, which would predict that persons with prior experience in community activities would be most likely to respond to new opportunities for community participation. Unger and Wandersman (1983), for example, have speculated that prior experiences in community organizations may enhance skills in group work. Our data on community participation are not of sufficient detail to explore the possible skill-building functions of community involvement.

It appears that stressful life conditions led participants to emphasize utilization of staff services. Relatively high stress levels were negatively

associated with attendance at group meetings and positively related to staff services. For high stress mothers, staff assistance provided in a one-to-one exchange may have been easier to tap and more relevant to a specific problem than the diffuse resources of a discussion group. Further, it may have been difficult to incorporate the structure of a twice-weekly group session into an everyday life of stressful circumstances; consultation with a staff member (i.e., via a home visit or telephone call) would have required less effort. It is worth noting, however, that the high stress persons moved over time to establish ties with the group, sharing experiences with the group (narrative behavior) by midyear and subsequently coming to feel connected with other persons in the group. Low attendance could not be interpreted as a sign of low involvement with the group.

As predicted, mothers with one child had lower attendance rates than mothers with two children. We speculate that the presence of a second child served as a source of encouragement for program attendance. The anecdotal evidence for this idea was strong. Mothers frequently told program staff that they came to group meetings because of the older child (e.g., "He was up early, standing at the window and watching for the van to pick us up."). For two-child families, program attendance also may have provided a respite from the everyday stresses of having a second child (e.g., sibling rivalry). The older (and newly "displaced") child's participation in the program's preschool may have provided a useful separation of the child from the mother and the new sibling, and offered the older child a set of peer playmates not readily available at home. It is not clear what factors were operating in families with three or more children to generate low program attendance levels. The vast majority (82%) of these mothers had a school-aged child(ren). In terms of practical logistics, it may have

been more difficult to attend a program where all children were not participants in the same setting. Having an older child in school may have complicated schedules regarding program participation (e.g., leaving the program in time to be home with the child arrived from school) and provided the mothers with a competing source (the school) of interest and possible involvement. Staff reports of anecdotal information support this interpretation. Regardless of group meeting attendance levels, staff services seemed to be a major form of contact with the program for mothers with more than one child; there was a positive relationship between number of children and utilization of staff servives.

The mother's attitude toward the child's expression of impulse was one of the strongest predictors of program participation in this study. Impulse expression was positively correlated with attendance at group meetings and special events, and with verbal participation at all time periods. Impulse expression also was related to narrative behavior and disclosure; in addition, it was associated with the relationship between verbal participation and attendance, as reported in Analysis I. The strength and consistency of relationships between impulse expression and program participation suggest the measure may have tapped the mother's attitude toward her own (and the child's) expression of impulse. The scale may reflect a dispositional tendency governing the readiness of the individual to become involved with persons and events in the environment. The significant role of impulse expression as a predictor variable in the present study is consistent conceptually with findings of recent studies which point to the importance of personal factors in the mobilization of support. For instance, Eckenrode (1983) found internal locus of control and positive beliefs in the benefits of help-seeking to be associated with

support mobilization, independent of the number of potential supporters available. Kobasa's (1979) work on hardiness also is of interest here. Her concept of hardiness includes a positive view of change; an ability to be involved with others and also committed to self; and a belief that one has some control over the events of one's life.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The study provides support for two different paradigms of prediction. The first centers upon need, and indicates that utilization will occur where program offerings match participant need. As part of this paradigm, different pathways of induction into the program were identified. Persons with relatively low stress moved directly into the group, establishing a commitment to the program through verbal participation and narrative behavior at time 1; persons with relatively high stress made contact first with staff members, and only later began to establish ties with the group. Limited peer ties, stressful life circumstances, and number of children were major indicators of need for program services.

A second paradigm involves the identification of personal factors which facilitate or impede the utilization of program opportunities. The dispositional tendency reflected in the attitude toward impulse expression was a major predictor variable here. It also appears that involvement in helping relationships with parents and other social network members may contribute to a readiness to utilize program services; research is needed on the ways in which involvement in social networks relates to a personal style or skill in utilizing resources.

The findings have several implications for the operations and design of early intervention programs aimed at parents. First, the data seem to suggest

that participants "take" from a program what they need. For instance, mothers living in highly stressful conditions sought out the special assistance of staff, and mothers with limited peer ties made significant use of peer activities in the program. This interpretation calls into question program policies and staff practices that prescribe a modal or ideal pattern of participation (e.g., high attendance, friendships with program peers). Perhaps program staff should enhance (rather than attempt to change) individual differences in patterns of program participation. It appears that factors associated with variations in participation are well beyond a program's control. Consider the matter of attendance. Most programs expend considerable energy in efforts to increase attendance levels. Yet our data suggest that attendance is connected to forces (e.g., life stress, dispositional tendencies) that cannot be readily modified by a program. Although extensive support services were implemented in an effort to increase attendance levels in the present program (e.g., child care, transportation), for example, there was a relatively low attendance rate among mothers in the high stress subsample.

Second, the findings appear to suggest the usefulness of comprehensive programs for low-income populations. While we have no data on participant responses to different program conditions, patterns of program use in the present study suggest that ancillary services were major sources of assistance to many mothers. The high use of staff services by mothers in the high stress subsample, and the apparent importance of the preschool to multiparous mothers suggest the absence of these program components may have made the program significantly less attractive to many mothers. Indeed, use of such terms as ancillary and core to describe a particular program component may vary by the perspective of the participant. At the same time, it should be noted that

low income per se need not be a deterrent to participation in a peer group program; in the absence of stress, mothers with low income utilized the program primarily for opportunities in group meetings and other events offering contact with peers.

FOOTNOTES

[1] One woman who remained with the program for well over a year never consented to an interview. For observational data, then, the sample was 42; for interview data, 41.

[2] For an examination of differences between short-term and long-term participants, see Powell (1984).

[3] The suggestion that narrative behavior be recognized as a distinct type of interaction originated with Diane McCallum.

[4] Almost 50% of the interaction was classified as giving opinion. Comments directed toward others in the form of a joke or question were classified as initiation; and concurrence was a category which included laughing at a joke, spoken praise or approval, and silent nods of agreement. Opinion, initiation, and concurrence each showed relationships with other variables which were similar to those of total amount of verbal participation; hence, these results are not reported here.

[5] On the initial interviews many respondents listed as "friends" persons who were also close relatives: mother, sister, cousin. In interviews conducted after experience with the program, these "friendly relatives" were unlikely to be listed as friends.

[6] An attempt was made to use unemployment and welfare assistance as indicators of objective financial stress; however, these measures showed no relationship to total stress and were not investigated further.

[7] Persons who showed only financial stress, without other indications of stress, did not differ significantly from low stress persons in their response to the program.

[8] The 64 mothers who responded to the MAS included persons in the sample for the present study (n=38) and early terminators of program participation (n=26).

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Appendix

Items used in the measure of attitude toward the expression of impulse

NOTE: There are 3 levels of agreement and 3 levels of disagreement offered for each item. The "expressive" answer is to reject the statements as given.

The questions children ask often seem to be ridiculous.

Young children seem to ask far too many questions.

Children seem to ask questions about things which should not concern them.

A three-year-old should not be told how babies are made.

Mothers worry that young children who play with their genitals will be harmed by this play.

A mother needs to be clever in learning how to discourage her four-year-old from asking questions about sex until he (she) is old enough.

A child's curiosity about sex should be curbed if he (she) is to grow into a satisfactory adult.

Good mothers keep a tight hold on their child's expression of angry feelings.

(REVERSE-SCORE) Children should be encouraged to express their anger as well as their more pleasant feelings.

Children are likely to get something and break if it mothers don't keep their eyes on them every moment.

When a mother limits a child's expression of angry feelings, she does it for his (her) own good.

If you give a child an inch, he (she) will take a mile.

Table 1. Correlations between Two Types of Verbal Behavior and Other Aspects of Program Participation

	Total Verbal Participation			Narrative Behavior		
	T-1	T-2	T-3	T-1	T-2	T-3
Attendance at Group						
T-1	.39*e	.16	.28(e)	.34*	-.20	-.15
T-2	.33*e	.10	.17	.11	-.28+	-.26
T-3	.48**e	.32*(e)	.40*	.22	-.09	-.14
Staff Service						
T-1	.12	.34*	.38*(h)	.33*	.08	.19(h)
T-2	.15	.51***h	.41*h	.12h	.28+(h)	.24h
T-3	.13	.24	.29(h)	-.25	.04	.08
Disclosure						
T-2	.21	.20	.22	.34*1	.28+h	.26h
T-3	.13	.10	.12	.43*1	.16h	.20h
Acquaintance						
T-2	.27+	.07	.09	.46**1	.19	.15
T-3	.14	-.02	.03	.37*1	.15(h)	.14(h)

+ $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

[e] Correlation was generated by persons high in attitude toward impulse expression, not by persons who were low (controlled) in impulse expression attitudes. Parentheses indicate that the correlation for the "expressive" half of the sample was significant at .10; otherwise, $p < .05$.

[h] Correlation was generated by the high stress subsample, not the low stress subsample. Parentheses indicate that the correlation for the high stress subsample was significant at .10; otherwise, $p < .05$.

[1] Correlation was generated by the low stress subsample, not the high stress subsample. Parenthese indicate that the correlation for the low stress subsample was significant at .10; otherwise, $p < .05$.

Table 2. Some Program Participation Correlates of Narrative Behavior, Separately for High Stress and Low Stress Subsamples

	High Stress			Low Stress		
	Narrative Behavior			Narrative Behavior		
	T-1	T-2	T-3	T-1	T-2	T-3
Staff Service						
T-1	.43	.18	.53^{+}	.29	-.08	-.16
T-2	.63*	.49^{+}	.68*	-.17	-.01	-.28
T-3	-.28	-.19	-.03	-.29	.05	-.23
Acquaintance						
T-2	.26	.31	.33	.55**	.23	.27
T-3	.06	.55^{+}	.58^{+}	.54**	.12	.08
Disclosure						
T-2	.19	.62*	.62*	.43*	.22	.25
T-3	.24	.64*	.83*	.52*	.05	.03

$^{+}p < .10$ $^{*}p < .05$ $^{**}p < .01$

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Table 3. Correlations between Predictor Variables and Measures of Program Participation

	Peer Contact	Relative Contact	Parent Support	Reciprocity	Social Participation[a]	Life Event Stress	Total Stress[a]	Number Children[a]	Im puls
Attendance									
Grp:T-1	-.05	-.22	-.01	.17	.30	-.20	.21	.05	.35
T-2	-.08	-.14	-.06	.21	.09	-.43**	.28	.20	.22
T-3	.14	-.08	.03	.15	.08	-.32*	.22	.39+p	.35
Special events	-.29+	.04	-.04	-.01	.18	-.13	.05	.42*	.33
Extra evenings	-.34*	-.01	.09	-.11	.32p	.02	.08	.21p	.17
Verbal Participation									
T-1	.04	.06	-.01	.17	.23	.03	.22	.15	.39
T-2	.04	.16	-.01	.17	.44*	.22	.33	.19	.37
T-3	.13	.31t	-.01	.16	.53*	.26	.40	.28	.33
Narrative									
T-1	.16	.14	.09	.46**	.25	.01	.11	.13	.34
T-2	.23	.05	.11	.18	.28	.38*h	.41+	.01	.23
T-3	.57**	.10	.01	.53**	.30	.30	.27	.16	.01
Acquaintance									
T-2	-.13	.02	.44**	-.05	.28	.10	.39	.12	.26
T-3	.13	.35*	.17	.23	.09	-.10	.31	.09	.21
Disclosure									
T-2	-.00	.11	.43**	-.03	.27	-.05	.40+	.17	.38
T-3	.15	.31+	.21	.26	.07	.02	.06	.22	.27
Staff Service									
T-1	.11	.25	-.23	.38*1	.16	.22	.40+	.27	-.07
T-2	.28+	-.17	-.32*	.25	.24	.26+p	.60***	.35+	-.06
T-3	.03	.17	-.17	.00	.03	.31+p	.42	.54**	-.16

Footnotes for Table 3.

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^{+}p .10 $^{*}p$ .05 $^{**}p$ .01 $^{***}p$ .001

a. Variable is categorical; analysis used ANOVA. Value reported is for eta; significance assessed by F test.

p. Relationship is statistically significant when influence of other variables is controlled through partial correlation.

l. Relationship is statistically significant for the low stress subsample, and does not exist in the high stress subsample.

h. Relationship is statistically significant for the high stress subsample, and does not exist in the low stress subsample.